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ABSTRACT

These three papers represent the results of the third phase of Florida's Impact of Testing Project. After reviewing the background to the project, the first paper discusses third-phase findings in terms of project objectives, i.e.: to determine entry-level assessment procedures and their uses in student placement; to determine the impact that entry-level testing has had on instructional strategies and personnel; and to project changes for Florida's community colleges. After noting that non-traditional students may react negatively to mandatory assessment testing and that some legislators are opposed to funding postsecondary remedial education, the paper concludes that faculty are willing to adjust course content, grading policies, and assignments based on college-level testing, but have concerns about accountability, supervisors' qualifications for judging basic skills instructors, and variations in assessment tests and procedures. The second paper provides a summary of faculty, counselor, and manager perceptions of the impact of entry-level assessment and placement, while the third paper provides greater detail on the spring 1982 survey upon which the perception summary was based and reviews findings in terms of faculty involvement in entry-level assessment and attitudes toward assessment procedures, the open door policy, developmental education, counseling, and highly advanced or esoteric courses. The survey instrument and responses are also included. (KL)

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The Florida Association of Community Colleges

Presents

An Assessment of

The Impact of Entry-Level Placement Assessment

on the Climate of

Teaching and Learning

in

Community Colleges in Florida

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ABSTRACT

The Florida Test of College-Level Academic Achievement in now approved for administration, but until the level of attainment associated with upper division success is specified, cutoff scores for admission to various programs may not be set nor may the community college diploma be denied. The impact of the Sophomore Test, initially, will be in the comparative listing of community colleges and universities published after the first testing sequence finishes.

The next effort by the legislature will be to standardize entry level testing and require placement of students into remedial classes. Combined with the Gordon Rule,* these mandates will align community college and university curricula with the competencies emphasis of the Sophomore Test.

Past responses to our polls indicate community college faculties welcome the establishment of entry level criteria and are willing to make course changes to ensure students master required competencies, but, at present, the tests used to access entry level skills, the norms, the counseling of students into developmental courses differ from college to college. Clearly, entry level assessment procedures statewide are not standard and faculties wait for their specific college to make recommendations.

* Twelve (12) semester hours of English coursework in which the student is required to produce written work of at least six thousand (6,000) words and six (6) semester hours of mathematics coursework at the level of college algebra or higher.

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT

In the spring of 1979, the Florida Legislature enacted CS/HB 1689 (Subsection 240.319(3)(p)(q)(r)F.S.), a bill designed to improve the quality of post-secondary education in Florida. On June 23, 1979, the FACC/DOE Impact of Testing Project was formed, and by December, 1979, concluded that community college faculty viewed testing as having long term positive effects upon the communication and computations skills of graduates. In January, 1980, the Essential Academic Skills Project convened and their interim report, published in June, 1980, identified "those communications and mathematical skills which appear essential for students to possess as they complete their first two years of college and prepare to enter a baccalaureate program."

In April, 1981, the FACC/DOE Impact of Testing Project completed its second phase and voiced faculty concern about shifting enrollment patterns, possible instructional pressures generated by a collegewide emphasis upon essential skills, and the ability of individual community colleges to maintain atonomy while accommodating the pressures generated by a state controlled testing program.

With the Sophomore Test scheduled to begin October 26, 1982, the Impact of Testing Project enters a third phase as it assesses the impact of entry level placement assessment on the climate of teaching and learning in Florida's community colleges.

This committee has been charged with examining the following implications of entry level assessment:

(1) Determine how each community college uses entry level assessment and how the assessment is used in placing incoming freshmen.

Across the State of Florida many different assessment instruments are used. These instruments range from commercial achievement tests to instructional developed diagnostic tests. Writing samples are used at some colleges to assess writing skills, but at the majority of the colleges, no writing assessment is done at the point of a student entry into the college parallel program. Cutoff scores vary from school to school.

Test scores are evaluated in many ways. There are self-assessment instruments in which the students receives a machine written letter giving advice and a counselor's telephone number. At other institutions the tests are immediately scored by machine and the student immediately sees an academic advisor where course selection is made and registration follows.

At present, the community colleges in the state are divided about requiring remediation. Fifteen community colleges require mandatory placement based upon assessment scores, while thirteen do not. Clearly, entry level assessment is still in its infancy in terms of system-wide agreement or standardization.

(2) Determine the impact that entry level assessment has had on instructional strategies.

Course content has been and is being adjusted to take into account the impact of the College-Level Test of Academic Skills. Plans for increasing developmental programs and remedial studies have evolved in anticipation of the added numbers of students needing to prepare for exit exams. Student tutors, volunteers from the community, paraprofessionals, even the Phi Theta Kappa Honorary are involved in the creation of programs designed to help students lacking entry level skills. IMTS (Individualized Manpower Training System) and PLATO (Computer Aided Instruction) also appear to be a method of expanding developmental programs within existing resources.

Yet, there is a lack of trained personnel to deal with the large number of students arriving with deficiencies in communications and computations. Often, full-time faculty are not trained for these areas and supervisors are reluctant to transfer tenured staff until the full impact of the testing program is understood. It would appear that Florida's community colleges are in a period of major transition, but exactly what direction that transition will take is still very much in doubt.

(3) Determine the impact that entry level assessment has had on instructional personnel.

Reassignments of personnel has taken place, and students in great numbers are being encouraged to seek additional instruction from specially trained developmental personnel. Still, as of this date, the community colleges are divided about requiring students to enroll in needed remedial courses.

At present, adjunct faculty such as peer tutors, educational aides, and volunteers, rather than tenured professionals, to a great degree, support the colleges' remedial efforts.

Whereas there appears to be the need for major administrative reorganizations, retraining programs for tenured faculty, and the hiring of new personnel specially trained in developmental education, there does not appear to be any additional appropriations to accomplish these objectives. Whether a college can make these adjustments within existing resources remains a very big question.

(4) The Future

Much will change in Florida's community colleges during the decade of the 80's.

1. Entry level assessment will become a critical element in the process that will insure the acquisition of the defined academic skills. New assessment techniques will have to be developed, and students will have to be tracked and reassessed as they move through the curriculum towards the exit test. The counseling process must be redefined and become more academically functional.

2. Programmed materials, institutionally designed and administered by peer tutors, paraprofessionals, and teaching assistants under the aegis of curriculum coordinators, will result in new cost-saving methods of instruction. Whereas the 70's saw significant developments in the area of educational technology, the 80's may be the decade in which these materials are put to the test of practicability.

3. The teaching profession cannot compete with industry for the service of people with high technology and mathematical training. Surely this will produce a critical and continuing shortage of mathematics and high technology instructors. New methods of instruction using automation must be found so as to maximize the talents of these math and high technology instructors still in this profession in the 1980's and beyond.

4. The communication curriculum must be adjusted to conform to the requirements of the Sophomore Test.

5. New methods must be found to deal with the logistics of evaluating first-time-in-college students. Testing, grading the test, and then counseling the students, must be done in an effective and efficient manner to accomplish the orderly start of classes.

CONCERNS

(1) Historically, the community college has been the entry point in post-secondary education for the non-traditional student; the recipient of a G.E.D. diploma, the mature woman, and the second choice student. These types of students have strong negative feelings about assessment testing. Other considerations this massive entry level testing will produce are:

a. How does one assess the non-traditional student without such testing becoming a barrier to his/her enrollment in college.

b. What controls will be used to assure adequate competencies are attained prior to entry into college-level courses.

c. Will the community college open-door policy continue?

(2) There exists a strong disinclination by some members of the legislature to fund remedial education beyond the K-12 levels. Initial experiences with entry level testing indicates that perhaps 75% of first-time-in-college students need some degree of remediation in either communications and/or computations. Although the community colleges are currently being funded for developmental education, any retrenchment from that position would seriously threaten the education of the hundred of thousands of community college students.

CONCLUSION

Faculty willingness to adjust course content, grading policies and to accept the necessary reassignments based upon the impact of college-level testing is clear. Yet, professors voice concern about how they can be held accountable for student scores on a Sophomore Test administered one, two or even three years after the student completes a course.

Furthermore, supervisors often are not qualified, by specific training, to judge professors working in essential skill areas. Yet these supervisors hold the power of evaluation and reassignment. Communication, particularly if the professor and his supervisor disagree, could be difficult, if not impossible.

At present, the tests used to access entry skills and the procedures for complying with the law vary, and professors are insecure about their college's future reaction once fall testing is completed and the Gordon Rule SBE 6A-10.30 implemented.

1982, a key year for the statewide testing program, represents a transition phase in the implementation of the college-level testing law. Only after state norms are established and placement in remedial programs standardized across the state, can the comparison between student skill levels at entry and at exit from the college be accurately correlated. Then, and only then, can a community college's curriculum and the professors working within that curriculum be compared.

Summary of the DOE/FACC

Grant Team Study of

the

Impact

of

Entry Level Placement Assessment

During February, March and April 1982, team members visited all community college campuses, talked to faculty, counselors and managers and analyzed both the questionnaire responses and the comments written on the survey sheets. The following statements reflect this group's perceptions of community college reaction to the impact of any entry level assessment and placement necessitated by statute FS 240.319 (3) (p) (g) (1).

1. There is a widespread faculty dissatisfaction with the decline in quality of academic preparation of students entering our colleges. Data from most community colleges tend to agree that a minimum of 40% of new students do not meet local minimum standards in reading, written expression or computations. Therefore, entry level assessment and mandatory placement are viewed as screening devices to require students to enroll in remedial classes or to prevent these students from enrolling in college. Within our state's community college system, there is widespread agreement that the purpose of higher education is not remediation.
2. Entry level assessment is viewed as a viable method to both establish and maintain higher academic standards throughout all A.A. degree programs.

3. Entry level assessment needs to be extended to include all general education subjects. At present only communications and computations skills are being tested.

4. Faculty agreed, as did counselors and supervisors, that the academic competencies determined, developed, and accepted by over 3,000 faculty, were reasonable, and all colleges are optimistic that their curriculum changes and instructional strategies will prepare their graduates to do well on the Sophomore Test.

5. Smaller class sizes in all communications classes is eagerly anticipated by communications faculty across the state, and faculty view smaller classes as a prime factor in establishing and maintaining quality instruction throughout the communications curriculum.

6. There is a correlation between fewer financial aid students entering college and entry level assessment. One financial officer predicted that 50% of these students might be eliminated from even enrolling in college.

7. Consideration should be given to the "part-time" student who is attending college for enrichment and growth rather than a degree. There may be a personal gain for this student even though he never meets an entry level requirement. An entry-level test waiver policy should be established for our older learners or else educational opportunities for those mature students who have scholastic potential will be eliminated. This will impact most cruelly upon those men and women reentering college after being out-of-school for several years.

8. There is a suspicion that many tenured faculty members have negative attitudes towards teaching remedial classes. Yet these same professors, as a result of entry-level assessment and mandatory placement of students, may be assigned to teach remedial or developmental classes. Therefore, designated funds and in-service training should be offered these tenured professionals in order to retain their services.

9. Many supervisors, pressed to staff developmental classes and forced by the Gordon Rule to schedule more classes which emphasize composition, express the attitude that any liberal arts professor can teach composition at any level. These supervisors are caught on the horns of a rather sharp dilemma; they must staff these composition classes but are given no new funds to hire additional staff. Obviously, there will have to be a rethinking of the utilization of human and physical resources.

10. If, based upon entrance assessment, a student is assigned remedial coursework, a time limit of specific duration (i.e., one semester or one year) should be placed upon the student. If, after this time limit expires, the student still has not demonstrated the skills necessary to succeed in college-level work, he should be terminated by the college.

11. Faculty teaching liberal arts courses other than communications complain that although communications classes may be reduced in enrollment to accommodate the Gordon Rule, their classes might not be so limited, although their courses are to be included as writing courses under their college's alternative plan.

12. The implementation of the Gordon Rule without the additional funding needed to create smaller classes or to hire additional staff to teach these classes is perceived by communications and computations teachers as a legislative criticism of their efforts. The teaching of proper written expression and the ability to manipulate mathematical symbols and concepts is not the responsibility of only the communications and mathematics divisions at any college. They are a <u>total</u> curriculum responsibility and must involve <u>all</u> coursework leading to the A.A. degree.

The Impact of Entry-Level Testing

Spring 1982

Analysis Prepared by
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Over the past three years, a group of Florida's community college instructors have visited community colleges in Florida and have conducted a series of polls that have attempted to measure faculty attitudes about the effects of the legislation that has resulted in the creation of the College-Level Academic Skills Program and the College-Level Academic Skills Test.

The first poll, conducted shortly after the passage of the legislation, attempted to measure attitudes about the broad issues raised by the legislation. The second poll focused on the effects of the establishment of student performance standards. Both the first and second polls indicated that the faculties of Florida's community colleges welcomed the establishment of statewide student performance standards. It was equally clear that the teaching staffs were willing to make those adjustments in their courses that were necessitated because of the adoption of statewide standards. By the time the second poll was taken, it became apparent that the majority of the instructors were actively participating in revising courses or doing whatever was necessary to prepare students to perform well on the Sophomore Exit Test, now known as CLAST. Although not in place in the majority of the institutions, the teaching faculty saw great merit in entry-level assessment as mandated by law.

By the spring of 1982, most of the colleges had in place some form of entry-level assessment. The third poll in this series was an attempt to measure faculty attitudes toward the initial results of entry-level assessment.

The first series of questions in this year's poll sought to measure how much faculty involvement there had been in entry-level assessment. An overwhelming 90% of those polled indicated that their college was engaged in research to determine entry-level performance standards. Almost two-third of the instructors responding (64%) felt that the establishment of entry-level standards in computation and communication would result in mandatory placement either at the present or in the near future, and 90% of those polled indicated that their college was working toward compliance of SBE Rule 6A-10.31, "College-Level Communication and Computation Skills."

The next series of questions asked for the instructors opinions as to the worth of entry-level assessment and how entry-level assessment might effect their teaching situation. Almost three-fourth of the faculties (72.7%) responded that they strongly agreed or agreed that faculty input influenced college policies about student assessment. This figure shows a marked improvement over the 1980 figure generated from a similar question. In 1980, only 34% of those polled answered that faculty input influenced college policies toward student assessment. Perhaps this strong shift towards involvement indicates the campus-wide efforts that are essential to meet the caveats of CLASP.

When asked if they thought entrance assessment would improve classroom conditions, 82% of the instructors strongly agreed or agreed, a 2% gain over the 1980 figures. However, in 1980, responding to the same question, 8% either had no opinion or disagreed. In 1982, no one disagreed indicating a strong belief in the merits of entry-level assessment albiet for some the jury was still out on the matter.

The instructors in Florida's community colleges know that it is no longer business as usual in their classrooms. When asked if there will be an impact on their grading policies as a result of requiring higher student achievement levels, 90% agreed or strongly agreed. No one dissented. Some 30% indicated that changes would occur in the area of course assignments; however, three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they had not come to a decision on what effects the performance standards would have on their teaching strategies or course content. Perhaps, based on the experience of the last decade, 90% of the instructors saw no effects on the sizes of their classes.

Displaying some degree of anxiety over what effects entry-level testing would have on the open door policy, both this year's poll and the 1980 poll show only 45% of the instructional personnel believing that students who do not have prerequisite skills should be barred from entry-level classes. Perhaps this is an indication of instructional personnel's distrust of the accuracy of current testing practices or perhaps a reluctance to set up barriers after having notable success with "second chance" students.

Although faculties may be waffling on the subject of barring entry to those students who do not display adequate preparation, 75% agree or strongly agree that entry-level testing will discourage students from attending community colleges. Only time and the enrollment figures will confirm or deny the prediction.

In 1980, 54% of those polled said that if the number of developmental students increased, the college should divert more of its resources to developmental students. Again in 1982, 54% would divert resources to developmental students; however in 1980, 25% disagreed with diverting resources. In 1982, no one disagreed. It would seem that in the abstract the problem did not demand a critical choice but now that the reality of assessment is here, a programmatic reallocation of resources seems inevitable.

A similar attitude shift seems to be going on in regards to counseling. In 1980, 54% agreed or strongly agreed that academic counseling played an important role in placing students in appropriate entry-level classes. In 1982, that figure had grown to 63%. In 1980, 8% thought academic counseling was not important. No one in the 1982 poll thought academic counseling was unimportant.

Attitudes towards the cancellation of highly advanced and/or esoteric classes have changed as well. Sixty-three percent (63%) of those polled strongly agreed or agreed that highly advanced or esoteric classes should not be cancelled in favor of developmental classes. Today only half of the instructors (36%) polled feel that such classes should not be cancelled. Like the poll results concerning shifting resources to meet developmental needs, perhaps the realities of assessment have caused a re-thinking of positions concerning course offerings.

The mood of uncertainty resulting from entry-level assessment and the establishment of performance standards can be summed up by comparing the 1980 and 1982 responses to the statement "full-time tenured faculty members, surplus to departmental needs, should be retrained for remedial teaching assignments." In 1980, 41% indicated agreement or strong agreement, 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed while 28% voiced a neutral position. Clearly in 1980 there were strong sentiments on either side of the question. After working on CLASP for two years, positions have changed. Thirty-six percent (36%) agreed that surplus faculty should be retrained and reassigned and 63% voiced a wait and see attitude. No one strongly disagreed or even disagreed that such may have to be the case.

In 1980, CLASP and CLAST were only ideas. By 1982, they had become realities. Hard line positions have shifted. Everyone knows that entry-level and exit-level assessments will have major effects on teaching in Florida's community colleges. No one is quite sure just what those effects will be.

FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF ENTRY-LEVEL
ASSESSMENT/SPRING 1982

SAMPLE SIZE - 308
COLLEGES SURVEYED - 28

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	
196 63.6%	112 36.3%		1. I am familiar with the SBE Rule 6A-10.31 "College-Level Communication and Computation Skills."
280 90.9%		28 9%	2. My college is formulating and undertaking actions to comply with the SBE Rule "College-Level Communication and Computation Skills."
140 45%	140 45%	28 9%	3. I have been directly involved in establishing student performance standards for individual courses.
280 90.9%		28 9%	4. Research has been conducted at my college to determine the level of basic academic skills of entering students in communication and/or computation.
140 45%		168 54%	5. My college has redefined (is redefining) its admissions counseling, course placement and advisement services to take into account the entry assessment and placement program required by the SBE Rules.
140 45%		168 54%	6. My college has identified and adopted the entry tests to be used in determining basic academic skills.
196 63%	56 18%	56 18%	7. At my college, student placement in communication and computation courses, based upon scores obtained during entry assessment, is or will be mandatory.
112 36%	196 63%		8. This academic term, I am teaching one or more remedial classes.
140 45%	168 54%		9. This academic term, I am teaching one or more communication or computation classes.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	
84 27%	140 45%	84 27%			10. Faculty input influences college policies on the assessment of student's communication and computation skills.
168 54%	84 27%	56 18%			11. Entrance placement, based on the assessment of communication and computation skills, will improve the learning environment in my classroom.
	84 27%	168 54%	56 18%		12. Academic freedom in the classroom will be effected by the implementation of entering assessment tests.
56 18%	224 72%	28 9%			13. Instructors must be aware that the requirement for higher level student achievement may force a change in his/her grading practices.
					The establishment of student performance standards will force a change in my: (the instructor)
	84 27%	224 72%			14. (a) Teaching strategies
	84 27%	224 72%			15. (b) Course content
28 9%	84 27%	196 63%			16. (c) Course assignments
	28 9%	280 90%			17. (d) Class size

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	
28 9%	56 18%	140 45%	84 27%		18. Students must achieve a satisfactory entry level score prior to admission to my college-level class.
56 18%	84 27%	84 27%	56 18%	28 9%	19. Once entry testing is implemented, students who do not have the pre-requisite college-level skills should not be members of college-level classes.
56 18%	168 54%	84 27%			20. The entry assessment program will discourage students from attending community colleges.
140 45%	84 27%	84 27%			21. Entry testing will point out the need for more extensive remedial education offerings.
84 27%	84 27%	140 45%			22. If the number of developmental-studies students increases, the community college should devote more of its resources to them.
112 36%	84 27%	84 27%	28 9%		23. Academic counseling plays an important role in placing students in appropriate, entry level classes.
		196 63%	56 18%	56 18%	24. If more developmental/remedial classes are needed, they should be funded with monies obtained from a reduction or cancellation of more highly specialized and advanced courses.
	112 36%	196 63%			25. Full-time (tenured) faculty members, surplus to a departmental need, should be retrained for remedial teaching assignments.

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